


## 7. Conclusion

### The Path Forward: Challenges & Opportunities

Despite having prepared a narrative analysis and numerous recommendations for consideration by east side of Lake Winnipeg communities and the Government of Manitoba, this status report, as its title suggests, is a long way from completion. Negotiations and discussions on many of the planning, protection and development issues identified in the original mandate for the Broad Area Plan have not been completed, nor has there been adequate opportunity for east side residents to prepare their input to this planning process. As information-sharing sessions with communities started but a scant 10 months ago, this is not surprising. It is to the credit of the Government of Manitoba and its commitment to this exercise that it will likely extend the period for community input, thereby ensuring a Broad Area Plan that both protects the environment and responds to the economic and social needs of the residents of the east side of Lake Winnipeg.

Also encouraging are the progressive steps taken to date by both the Government of Manitoba and 13 of the 16 First Nations communities on the east side of Lake Winnipeg in signing an important *Memorandum of Understanding*. The memorandum commits these First Nations governments and the Government of Manitoba to a process of negotiations and consultations which may lead to a *Protocols of Agreement* that will be the centrepiece of the Broad Area Plan itself. Credit is also due to the remaining three non-signatory First Nations who continue to be represented at the discussion table. As suggested in an earlier section, if the Broad Area Plan defines what issues and proposals are to be subjected to a planning regime (transportation, protected spaces, mining, etc.), the *Protocols of Agreement* will determine how those issues come into play on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. Consistent with the recommendations in COSDI, the Government of Manitoba is strongly encouraged to commit to a separate process of protocol negotiations with the Métis Nation Government of the east side of Lake Winnipeg.





With the justifiable excitement and focus on the promise held by the negotiations and consultations on *Protocols of Agreement*, it is essential to the overall success of the East Side Planning Initiative to remember that the Broad Area Planning and protocol processes are inextricably intertwined. One cannot proceed without the other.

Another major facet of the implementation of the Broad Area Plan is the creation of a governance mechanism that will ensure adherence to the Broad Area Plan and *Protocols of Agreement*. The necessary authority will have to be vested in such a mechanism to guarantee local community input while adhering to the principles of sustainable development and protection of the environment, which are the foundations of the Broad Area Plan. It is not too soon to begin thinking of the possibility of legislative action to enshrine both the Broad Area Plan and the *Protocols of Agreement*, which will be essential to the plan's survival and implementation.

If undertaken with respect for the necessary complexity of the process, a measure of good faith and patience, and appropriate attention to detail, the Broad Area Plan for the east side of Lake Winnipeg will represent a watershed in the evolving relationship between government and Aboriginal communities in Canada. In terms of both the geographic area encompassed within the planning area and the complexity of the issues at stake, this is a most ambitious undertaking – one, that if successfully completed, will change the social and economic relationships between the Government of Manitoba and First Nations governments on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, and that will alter, for the foreseeable future, how land use planning is carried out in Manitoba.

There are numerous and daunting challenges to this enterprise: The constant challenge of ensuring that information and data is adequately shared with the population of the east side; the requirement to continuously engage the leadership and members of east side communities in building the Broad Area Plan; the need for vigilance and persistence in “following through” with all components of the planning exercise; ensuring that institutional inattentiveness does not permit the initiative to slowly slip below the horizon of possibility and imagination; the essential requirement for improved horizontal communications among provincial government departments, thereby reducing “stovepipe bureaucracy” and increasing the likelihood of a more coordinated and timely response to community needs; the challenges of using adaptive management techniques to allow the necessary flexibility to alter approaches and outcomes to the Broad Area Plan... endless as the list of challenges may appear, the potential rewards far surpass the fears which may be associated with this process.

First and foremost, should the protocol negotiations succeed and become the centrepiece of the Broad Area Plan, not only will it represent a landmark in government-to-Aboriginal government negotiations – it will also represent the first time in modern Canadian history that the process was initiated in its entirety by a non-Aboriginal government. The Government of Manitoba can enjoy a measure of pride in undertaking this risk-filled venture and committing itself to staying the course. The successful completion of both the protocols and the Broad Area Plan will contribute immeasurably to redefining relationships that have been marked historically by mistrust and bitterness. Should the protocols succeed in allowing Aboriginal communities to play the predominant role in charting their own futures with the access to the resources to do so, all Manitobans will benefit.

Another opportunity realized with the adoption of the Broad Area Plan for the east side of Lake Winnipeg is an unprecedented measure of protection for a significant and contiguous boreal environment. Faced with the seemingly relentless pressures of population expansion and development, the Broad Area Plan will redefine development in terms of its sustainability. Finally, the intrinsic value of the forest environment in “just being there” will be weighted equally with the values our society places upon turning the forest into commodities of necessity and convenience.

This status report is but a benchmark along the way, and the path ahead does finally offer a glimpse of what a fully functional Broad Area Plan may look like. The fragile coalition of interests which have contributed to the preparation of this report and support its objectives must now rely on the good faith and good will of the government which commissioned this initiative. Let us hope that this faith and this will has not been misplaced so that “*Promises to Keep*” will become promises kept.

